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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [NI](#) [ECOWAS](#) [OAU](#)

SUBJECT: ECOWAS: KOUYATE'S OAU CANDIDACY (ROUND TWO)

REF: ABUJA 579

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter, reason 1.5 (B/D).

11. (C) Ambassador Jeter met with ECOWAS Executive Secretary Lansana Kouyate on June 18. Regional issues, particularly Liberia, were the focus of their exchange (septel). Kouyate, in a private sidebar, also asked once again for USG support for his candidacy for Secretary General of the OAU, as he originally did at the end of March (reftel). Kouyate suggested that the dynamics of the contest had changed with the exit of one main candidate for the position: Ibrahima Fall (Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs at the UN) had withdrawn from the race. Furthermore, President Konare of Mali, rumored to be strongly supported by Nigeria and South Africa, was also not interested.

12. (C) Kouyate said that of his two main rivals for the position, the Namibian Foreign Minister, Theo-ben Gurirab, and former Ivoirian Foreign Minister, Amara Essy, the former was not an enthusiastic candidate. Thus, only Essy remained as a serious challenger. Essy, who initially lacked the support of the new government of Cote d'Ivoire, gained it only after the financial intervention of the Libyans, Kouyate said. Kouyate further asserted that some opposition among Francophone nations in the region, particularly Senegal, stemmed from Kouyate's unwillingness to "act with expediency" on the issue of Morocco's return to the OAU, including major concessions to Morocco on Western Sahara, and from a general and unfair perception that he and Guinea were too close to Anglophone nations (read: Nigeria) in West Africa. Kouyate indicated that he now has strong support from regional heavyweights, including Nigeria, Kenya and others.

13. (C) Ambassador Jeter explained, as he had previously, that the USG policy on the OAU SYG race, as for other regional bodies of which it was not a member, was not to endorse any candidate. From a practical perspective, added the Ambassador, any public support from the USG could likely backfire. Kouyate said he appreciated this, but asked that the USG quietly make appeals on his behalf to African governments with which the U.S. enjoyed especially good relations. Ambassador Jeter promised that he would forward this request to Washington. The OAU, said Kouyate, will vote in a new Secretary General on or about July 9.

14. (C) Comment. As we noted in March, Kouyate's departure from ECOWAS will be a loss for the U.S. and for the region. He is open and helpful with us, commands considerable respect in West Africa, and has been an able and effective manager of ECOWAS business in very trying times. From where we sit, there is no doubt that, from the field real and imagined contenders, Kouyate would be a very strong and able leader of the OAU. End Comment.

Jeter